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Drawbacks of the U.S. history curriculum

Did you know that in 2012 there was a survey conducted alongside the International Baccalaureate Organization which showed that 72 % of U.S citizens had no idea what region Afghanistan was in? (“Umich.edu”) As of 2023, it can almost be guaranteed that the percentage has not changed to a drastic degree. In American history classes, the lack of emphasis on global history and the challenges posed by recent censorship measures have kept students' from gaining the ability to develop a clear understanding of the past as well as draw their conclusions from it and apply them to the present and future.

Deciding to teach students who live in America only about history regarding the U.S. leads to these students being ignorant about the rest of the world. In a survey commissioned from Gallup by the Council on Foreign Relations and the National Geographic Society, the knowledge of American adults about geography and world affairs was tested and the results were, unfortunately, not shocking. Aptly said in the detailed findings section of this survey, “Americans exhibit considerable gaps in their knowledge about geography and international issues...Americans may be no more knowledgeable today than they were 30 years ago, despite increasing educational attainment in the U.S.” (“U.S. Adults' Knowledge About the World”) These scores being as low as they are has had a pretty large negative impact on our country's standard of education and puts us in a disadvantage when compared to other countries. The

reason for these low scores being the average among adults in the U.S. can be traced back to the poor quality of U.S. history classes in elementary, middle, and high school.

A big reason behind the development of the original public school was democratic democratic equality, people who defended the creation of public schools used and still use it as a defining argument. In this argument, the case is made that a democratic society can not continue unless it properly prepares students for the responsibilities behind citizenship. As a result of this, the first public schools did not place a large amount of emphasis on global history and focused their history classes on gaining knowledge regarding American history. While it is a valid argument behind the creation of schools and students need to be taught U.S. history, gaining knowledge of global history and events has to become an aspect of history that students are taught more about.

Not properly teaching American students about other nations leads to them believing harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about other nations. In the international education journal a research article was conducted regarding the need for cross cultural and global research and it states that, “A few more recent studies continue to suggest that American students lack basic knowledge of other nations....American high school and university students know very little about non-Western nations” (Lin) This journal also gives an analysis on global education in other countries, it’s shown that other countries have a much more head on approach to global learning leaving students in the U.S to fall behind. It states in the article “It is pleasing to see that global education was addressed in almost all of these countries during past years and more international content... has been increasingly presented in the school curriculum.” (Lin). The more our planet diversifies and the more interactions the U.S. has with other countries the more

our classrooms have to develop for students to gain a baseline knowledge about the history of the U.S. and the world.

Ignoring events that happened in US history to suit your preferences does not let children understand the truth behind our country. Much more of a recent hindrance to the education of students, the amount of censorship that has been implemented regarding our country's history has been increasing over time. As mentioned above, one reason behind the creation of public schools was for students to become proper U.S. citizens, and in the process, they would become 'Americanised' through multiple different methods (one example being the pledge of allegiance being said every morning). As a result, themes of patriotism enter history classes, making it so that teachers would prioritize students being pride in their country over historical facts, teachers would teach aspects of American history such as the American Revolution which highlights the good things about our country's past and not that dark parts. In history there has never been a country that's made all of the right decisions and only morally correct choices, it's more than possible to have pride for your country while also acknowledging it's weak points in history.

One way that schools in the U.S. have been implementing the idea that students do not need to learn all aspects of history is through educational gag orders which are state laws that "aim(s) to curb the teaching of "divisive concepts" in public schools, including race, gender, and dark moments in American history." (Spencer). The amount of these bills proposed and implemented has increased to a great extent over the past few years, one example being a proposed law in South Carolina that does not allow teachers to discuss any topic that creates "discomfort, guilt or anguish" based on political belief. If topics in history such as slavery were to be taught it would have to be in such a way that talks about the 'benefits' of slavery, being sure to mention how it taught African Americans 'valuable skills'. This teaching style leads to

students not learning the dark parts of history and gaining an idealized version of the events that shaped our country and world. In a similar vein to this, there has been a discussion of banning classes such as AP African American history in certain states, as well as critical race theory, for the same reasons mentioned above. When we decide to hide the events of our nation's history from students we end up raising individuals ignorant of the true events of the world's history causing them to not have the ability to help our country grow from its past.

The flaws in American history education, whether that be its focus on certain aspects of U.S. history or its more recent susceptibility to censorship, have kept students from understanding global events but also prevented them from learning the best way to analyze historical events and draw their conclusions from these. For our country to raise informed and educated citizens who are best fit for the job force or simply as voting citizens, they must gain sufficient knowledge of our world history as well as our current events.

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